

Day after tomorrow



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Climate change, like many other environmental problems, is slow to develop, not amenable to simple or fast solutions, and caused by factors that are both invisible and complex (Adam 17).

Making a narrative film about climate change therefore does not fit easily into the commercial formulae of mainstream Hollywood, which favour human-interest stories in which individual protagonists undergo a moral transformation before they resolve their problems through heroic action in the final act. Can such classical narratives mediate an issue as complex as climate change without being not only inadequate, but even dangerous, lulling their audience into a false sense of security about our ability to deal with such problems?

Ecocritic Richard Kerridge observes that a British journalist responded to the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in 1986 by framing it within the familiar narrative of the Second World War, with its emphasis on 'a successful outcome and a narrative closure'. For Kerridge, such narrative strategies may be an overly reassuring way of representing environmental threats, and reveal therefore that the 'real, material ecological crisis' is 'also a cultural crisis, a crisis of representation' (Kerridge 4).

Yet, as Jim Collins argues, 'mass-mediated cultures', including those of popular Hollywood cinema, are characterised by 'semiotic complexities of meaning production', which leave even popular, generic texts open to multiple interpretations (Collins 17). Film theorist Stephen Prince describes a Hollywood movie as a 'polysemous, multivalent set of images, characters, and narrative situations', which therefore constitute what he calls an

'ideological agglomeration', rather than a single, coherent ideological position (Prince 40).

This polysemy may arise from the Hollywood industry's commercial intention to maximize profits by appealing to as wide and diverse an audience as possible by making movies which, ideologically speaking, seek to have it all ways at once. One consequence is that, when we theorize about the effects popular movies may or may not have on public awareness of environmental issues, those effects are more complex, and less deterministic, than is often assumed in some academic film theories.

This essay will explore the range of meanings generated by *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), which frames the issue of anthropogenic climate change within the familiar genres of the disaster and science fiction movie. Ideological analysis of the film, combined with a study of its audience reception, suggests that even a classical Hollywood narrative can generate a degree of ideological ambiguity which makes it open to various interpretations, both liberal and conservative. The ideological ambiguity of *The Day After Tomorrow* derives in part from the way its narrative mixes the modes of realism, fantasy and melodrama.

A realist film will attempt to correspond to what we understand as reality, mainly through the optical realism of its mise-en-scene and the sense of psychological plausibility produced by both its script and the performance of its actors. Melodrama, on the other hand, will simplify character and heighten action and emotion beyond the everyday. Hollywood movies tend to work by moving between these two modes of representation. Some genres, such as science fiction and horror, also move between realism and

fantasy, a mode which exceeds realist plausibility by creating a totally fictive and impossible diegetic world.

As a science fiction movie, then, *The Day After Tomorrow* deliberately blurs the distinction between realism and fantasy. The narrative begins from a scientifically plausible premise: the melting of the Arctic ice-cap, caused by anthropogenic global warming, cools the North Atlantic Current, colloquially known as the 'Gulf Stream', and thereby affects the weather in the Northern hemisphere. The movie then extrapolates from this premise beyond even the worst-case scenarios proposed by climate scientists.

The switching off of the thermohaline current generates a global superstorm, as a result of which an ice sheet covers Scotland and a tsunami floods Manhattan. The movie's literary source, it is worth noting, was *The Coming Global Superstorm* (1999), by Art Bell and Whitely Streiber, whose television talk show on the paranormal suggests an interest in the 'parascientific'; that is, in speculation beyond what is provable or falsifiable by scientific method. When interpreted literally, that is, as realism, *The Day After Tomorrow* clearly violates notions of scientific plausibility.

The basic climatology in the movie is inaccurate: hurricanes can only form over large bodies of warm water, not the cold seas found in high latitudes, where polar lows are the main storm systems. The movie also distorts the science of climate change, mainly by accelerating the time frame within which its effects take place, and by making them much worse than predicted. Any slowdown in the thermohaline current would take a period of years, at least, and probably centuries, rather than the days featured in the film.

Moreover, even if the North Atlantic Current did switch off, average temperatures would still be likely to rise, rather than fall, because of the greenhouse gasses already in the atmosphere (Henson 112-5). The film's central narrative, in which government paleoclimatologist Jack Hall (Dennis Quaid) walks in sub-zero temperatures all the way from north of Philadelphia to the New York Public Library, to rescue his son Sam (Jake Gyllenhall) who is sheltering there, is thus impossible: neither would survive such low temperatures.

For helicopters to freeze in mid-air, temperatures would not only be too cold for snow, but also too cold for human survival. Burning books in a library would be insufficient to keep people alive. Such implausibilities are worth pointing out, not because cinema audiences necessarily take what they see as scientific truth, but because science fiction often provides an opportunity to learn some real science. Indeed, as we will see later in this essay, environmental groups used the release of the movie as a 'teachable moment' on the science of climate change (Leiserowitz 6).

The two-disc DVD edition of the movie includes a documentary on the science of climate change; screenwriter Jeffrey Nachmanoff commented on its release that, although 'our primary concern' in making the film 'was entertainment rather than education. On the DVD, there's room for both'. Acknowledging that the time frame he created for the movie was accelerated for fictional purposes, and that the 'superfreeze' was 'purely a cinematic device', he added that 'the political, agricultural and societal consequences of a sudden change in the ocean currents would still be catastrophic' (Nachmanoff 1).

To dismiss *The Day After Tomorrow* purely for its scientific inaccuracies, then, clearly misses the point of the movie, which is to use realist elements of climate science as a starting point for melodrama and fantasy, so that it can dwell on the spectacle of extreme weather, appropriate for a blockbuster disaster movie, and also invite the audience's emotional engagement with the human-interest story that becomes the main focus of narrative. It is to these elements in the film that we will now turn.

As a 'natural disaster' melodrama, the film works on an opposition between nature and civilization, and invites an ambiguous identification on the part of the viewer: in Hollywood terms, we are invited to 'root for' both nature and civilization at various points in the narrative, although the values of civilization eventually become the dominant ones. Before that happens, however, the scenes of extreme weather make the experience of environmental apocalypse strangely attractive. As Maurice Yacowar observes, the natural disaster movie 'dramatizes people's helplessness against the forces of nature' (Yacowar 218).

The set pieces of extreme weather in *The Day After Tomorrow* reveal the sublime power of wild nature: violent, chaotic, powerful beyond human control, and therefore exciting and seductive. Environmentalist Paul Hawken writes that the concept of doomsday 'has always had a perverse appeal, waking us from our humdrum existence to the allure of a future harrowing drama' (Hawken 204). As Stephen Keane points out, although disaster movies regularly feature television news reports commenting on the events that are taking place, they do not go on 'to make the critical point that we are all electronic voyeurs' (Keane 84).

The Day After Tomorrow follows this pattern. The audience's complicity in seeking cinematic thrills in the scenarios of mass death and destruction caused by the weather is encouraged, rather than questioned, by the movie itself. Indeed, such thrills are the *raison d'être* of its genre. Yet the aesthetics of the sublime have always been based on vicariousness; if we take pleasure in the destructive forces of nature, it is from the safe distance of our movie seats, where we are in the position of voyeurs, rather than of victims.

This construction of victimhood in the disaster movie depends on narrative alignment: when people die, we do not dwell on them, nor on the bereaved people they leave behind. Typical of the disaster genre, the focus of nature's destructiveness in *The Day After Tomorrow* is the city. Hollywood disaster movies, writes Geoff King, share with millennial groups 'a certain delirious investment in the destruction of the metropolis' (King 158). When a series of tornadoes attack Los Angeles, the *mise-en-scène* focuses on familiar landmarks: the Hollywood sign, the Capitol Records building, and a billboard advertising the model Angelyne.

Screenwriter Jeffrey Nachmanoff observes on the DVD commentary that preview audiences greeted the moment where the Angelyne sign flattens the television reporter with cheers and applause (Emmerich). The sense of retribution is difficult to avoid: perhaps there is poetic justice in the media figure, parasitical on other people's suffering, finding his nemesis in Angelyne, the model and aspiring actress who paid to advertise herself on her own billboards, and thus became for some emblematic of the meretricious values of the city.

As Mike Davis observes, Los Angeles is often given special treatment in apocalyptic narratives. 'No other city,' he writes, 'seems to excite such dark rapture'. Unlike other cities, the destruction of Los Angeles 'is often depicted as, or at least secretly experienced as, a victory for civilization' (Davis 277). Geoff King draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the 'carnavalesque' to account for such moments of 'licensed enjoyment of destruction', based on an 'overturning of cultural norms' (King 162). But the destruction is too cruel, as well as unfocussed and generalised, to be simply an anti-authoritarian gesture.

As Susan Sontag noted, science fiction films provide a 'morally acceptable fantasy where one can give outlet to cruel or at least amoral feelings' (Sontag 215). Freud's notion of the 'death wish' thus better captures the dark side of such fantasies. For Freud, such aggressions were natural drives that need to be controlled; art provides catharsis for such anti-social instincts. Patricia Mellencamp draws on Freud to argue that American television is both 'shock and therapy; it both produces and discharges anxiety' (Mellencamp 246).

The disaster movie works in a similar way, mobilising and exploiting our negative drives and emotions. But are there unconscious meanings specific to the natural disaster movie? One reading of such movies is as 'revenge of nature' narratives, which enact a fantasy of nature getting its own back for its mistreatment at the hands of human beings. Psychoanalyst Karl Figlio draws on the theories of Melanie Klein to argue that scientific thinking itself is an act of repressive violence towards Nature. 'Nature killed,' he writes, 'is

nature in a vengeful mood, a primitive retaliatory phantasy that fuels apocalyptic forebodings.

The more scientific the culture, the more it is at the mercy of irrational fears, and the more it is dependent on scientific protection from them' (Figlio 72). He cites Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as an 'extreme example of scientific mapping that calls forth revenge from nature' (75). According to this reading, then, when we watch nature getting its revenge, we as viewers are able to purge our guilt about its degradation. However, as Yacowar notes, the moral attitude of the typical disaster movie is ambiguous. Poetic justice in disaster films,' he writes, 'derives from the assumption that there is some relationship between a person's due and his or her doom'. However, this notion breaks down when the 'good die with the evil' (Yacowar 232). *The Day After Tomorrow* works according to these generic expectations, with Nature at times appearing amoral in its destructiveness, and at other times, a force of moral retribution and punishment. The arrogant businessmen who bribe the bus driver, and the corruptible bus driver himself, get their comeuppance when they drown in the tidal wave that engulfs Manhattan.

Jeffrey Nachmanoff reveals in the DVD commentary that, in an early draft of the script, the businessman had been negotiating an insider deal with the Japanese businessman killed by the hailstorm in Tokyo (Emmerich). In the final version, the latter lies to his wife on his cell phone moments before his death. The ethical critique in these scenes fits into the ideological agenda of many disaster films. As King writes, such films 'include an element of criticism of capitalism, but this is a gesture that for the most part leaves its core values largely intact.

A few 'excesses' are singled out, such as the greedy cost-cutting that undermines the integrity of the eponymous star of *The Towering Inferno*, leaving the remainder mostly untouched' (King 153). In *The Day After Tomorrow*, then, greedy, self-interested individuals are punished. Yet innocent people also die in the movie, including the climate scientists who freeze to death in Scotland, led by the avuncular Terry Rapson (Ian Holm), and Jack's friend Frank (Jay O. Sanders), who falls to his death through the roof of a building, after cutting his own rope to prevent his friends from endangering their lives in trying to rescue him.

These are figures of heroic sacrifice, also central to the disaster genre, because they bring out the redemptive aspects of the apocalypse. The film does not state clearly where the British royal family stand in this hierarchy of innocence and guilt: what is clear, is that death by climate change is no respecter of class privilege and wealth. The disaster movie, then, is about which values are the key to survival. The rescue of the innocent, French-speaking African family is thus crucial in enforcing the movie's ethical hierarchy based on racial, national and gender differences: they are saved by the white American woman (Laura), who in turn is saved by the white American male (Sam), thereby enacting in miniature two important themes in the movie. The most important of these is the narrative of male heroism and redemption. Melodrama, writes Linda Williams, is about a 'retrieval and staging of innocence' (Williams 7). In this film, the melodramatic plot of father rescuing son makes the moral point that hard-working fathers need to take a more active role in bringing up their sons.

The movie implies that, although millions of people may be dead, if one American family can be saved, then at least some good has come out of the eco-apocalypse. This message is more liberal, or at least not as unambiguously patriarchal, as in earlier disaster movies. In keeping with Stephen Prince's notion of ideological agglomeration, mentioned earlier, although Jack's wife is a doctor, she ends up playing the role of surrogate mother to a seven-year old boy with cancer, separated from his parents by the storm.

The movie can thus be interpreted as either liberal (she is a doctor) or conservative (she is placed in the stereotypical female role of nurturer). The second important theme in the movie is the United States' self-appointed role as global protector-policeman. The rescue narrative trumpets the frontier values of male physical heroism, strong leadership and individualism, encapsulated by the iconic image of the torch of the Statue of Liberty emerging from the waves of the tsunami that engulfs Manhattan.

However, America's role in world politics is also questioned by a more liberal discourse in the movie, when American refugees are forced to flee illegally into Mexico, in an ironic reversal of the real politics on the national border. This ironic reversal is itself made ambiguous, though, when later the United States government writes off all Third World debt, but in return, wins the right for its citizens to live as 'guests' in those countries. It should be noted that not all Hollywood movies with environmental themes are as individualistic in their proposed solutions as *The Day After Tomorrow*.

Some have endorsed more collective forms of action, even in narratives led by strong individuals: an image of placard-waving protestors recurs in *Free*

Willy 2: The Adventure Home (1995) and Fly Away Home (1996) as a sign of collective resistance. Ultimately, *The Day After Tomorrow* prefers American notions of liberal individualism, which it turns into universal values by identifying them with human civilization as a whole. Indeed, civilization, rather than wild nature, becomes the real object of audience identification by the end.

The choice of the New York Public Library as the place of sanctuary and rescue is significant in this respect. One of the survivors makes sure he preserves the Gutenberg Bible from burning, not because he believes in God, he says, but because, as the first book ever printed, it represents 'the dawn of the age of reason'. 'If Western civilization is finished', he adds, 'I'm going to save at least one little piece of it'. Ultimately, then, the movie celebrates reason and science as the values most central to Western civilization. Unusually for a Hollywood disaster movie, scientists are neither evil nor incompetent.

As Yacowar notes, specialists in disaster movies, including scientists, 'are almost never able to control the forces loose against them'. The genre thus serves 'the mystery that dwarfs science' (Yacowar 228). This is also true of *The Day After Tomorrow*, in that the scientists are unable to contain the devastating effects of climate change once they have begun. 'Ultimately,' writes ecocritic Sylvia Mayer, 'the movie makes the point that the most advanced and dedicated scientific work is still powerless against the forces of nature once they are unleashed' (Mayer 111).

Nevertheless, the scientists are the heroes of the movie. Their advice on the risks of climate change was ignored by the politicians until it was too late. As

the director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration angrily tells the Vice-President: 'You didn't want to heat about the science when it would have made a difference'. The scientists' computer models prove correct: in the movie, unlike in real life, climate science provides the clear, certain and unambiguous knowledge necessary for survival.

Moreover, advanced technology is ultimately a force for good. Jack is able to locate his son in the Public Library under the frozen wastes of Manhattan because of his friend's portable satellite navigation system (which, of course, would not work in such a massive storm). He is also seen driving a hybrid Toyota Prius earlier in the film. Reason, science and technology thus win the day. However, as Sylvia Mayer also notes, the movie stops short of simplistically advocating a technological fix for environmental problems as complex as climate change (Mayer 117).

The values of civilization finally triumph over the destructive forces of wild nature when the pack of wolves, which escaped from Central Park Zoo earlier in the movie, return to attack Sam and his friends when they are searching for medicine and food. That the wolves are computer-generated special effects only adds an extra layer of irony to the triumph of civilization and benign technology in the movie. Indeed, the movie itself can be seen as a paean to the imaginative power of Computer Generated Imaging.

In *Eco Media* (2005), Sean Cubitt argues that *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2002-3) can be read as a celebration of the computer technologies from which it was made, which are an artisanal mode of production that demonstrates a creative place for technology within 'green' thinking. There is an 'increasing belief', he suggests, 'that through the development of highly

technologised creative industries, it is possible to devise a mode of economic development that does not compromise the land' (Cubitt 10). The thematic resolution of *The Day After Tomorrow* is ambiguous, however.

The ending of the movie follows the recurrent pattern of the genre identified by Geoff King, in which 'the possibility of apocalyptic destruction is confronted and depicted with a potentially horrifying special effects/spectacular 'reality', only to be withdrawn or limited in its extent' (King 145). Typically, then, destruction is extensive, but total apocalypse is prevented at the last moment. The superstorm passes, thereby confirming Jack's earlier opinion that the storms will last 'until the imbalance that created them is corrected' by 'a global realignment'.

Gazing at a beautiful, calm Earth, an astronaut in the International Space Station comments that he has 'never seen the air so clear'. In Winston Wheeler Dixon's phrase, this could be the 'exit point for the viewer' that disaster movies invariably provide (Dixon 133); the moment where the audience is let off the hook with a simplistic, evasive solution to the seemingly intractable problem explored in the rest of the movie. To return to the question posed at the start of this essay, does such an ending merely encourage evasion, denial and complacency in regard to issues such as anthropogenic climate change?

Dixon argues that contemporary American cinema serves those who 'wish to toy with the themes of destruction', from movies about atomic apocalypse to those that flirt with Nazism. This cinematic 'cult of death', he concludes, is 'the ultimate recreation' for an exhausted, media-saturated culture, a cult which 'remains remote, carefully contained within a box of homicidal and

genocidal dreams' (Dixon 139). But the ideological ambiguity of *The Day After Tomorrow*, as well as its audience reception, suggests that the process of interpretation is more open and varied than this.

From an environmentalist perspective, the melodramatic ending of the film is ambiguous. No matter what human beings do, it appears, the Earth will heal itself. According to this reading, the message of the movie is that, because the storm eventually passes, we don't need to worry. This message resembles the right-wing appropriation of the Gaia hypothesis; that is, the idea, proposed by the British chemist James Lovelock, that the Earth as a whole is a self-regulating system in a natural state of homeostatic balance.

In his 1999 book *Hard Green: Saving the Environment from the Environmentalists*, Peter Huber used the concept of Gaia to justify a conservative manifesto that called for the dismantling of existing environmental regulations. The 'most efficient way to control' pollutants such as greenhouse gases, he argued, 'is not to worry about them at all. Let them be. Leave them to Gaia' (Huber 128). The notion of Gaia, we should note, is not the sole property of New Age environmentalists or deep ecologists.

According to this interpretation, the movie appears to endorse the idea that humanity, through a combination of ingenuity, courage and chance, can survive whatever Nature may throw at us, an argument used by conservatives like Huber to justify a non-interventionist approach to environmental issues. It is a mistake, however, to assume that the final moments of a movie, when narrative closure is achieved, dictate its overall

meaning. An analogy may be drawn here with the critical analysis of the role of women in film noir.

As Janey Place argues of the female characters in films such as *Double Indemnity* (1946), 'it is not their inevitable demise we remember but rather their strong, dangerous, and above all, exciting sexuality' (Place 48). In a similar way, the most memorable images in *The Day After Tomorrow* are probably the scenes of extreme weather. The main advertising image for the movie showed the shot of the hand of the Statue of Liberty held above the storm surge: an image of survival which at least includes a sense of struggle, rather than the calm, reposeful Earth revealed at the close of the film.

Indeed, the above interpretation of the film as conservative is contradicted by its more explicit message, which advocated liberal political reform in the election year of 2004. Early in the film, Vice-President Becker, played by an actor who bears an obvious resemblance to Dick Cheney, refuses to listen to the advice of scientists on global warming, arguing that to take action would harm the American economy. In another reference to George W. Bush's presidency, we are told that the administration in the movie has also refused to sign up to the Kyoto Protocol on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

At the end of the movie, Becker, now President, appears on television to apologise to the nation out of a newfound sense of humility: 'For years we operated under the belief that we could continue consuming our planet's natural resources without consequence. We were wrong. I was wrong'. Perhaps the most unbelievable part of the whole movie, the President's public apology confirms the words of the African-American homeless man

earlier in the film, who refers to people with their 'cars and their exhausts, and they're just polluting the atmosphere'.

The disaster has been a wake-up call for America, and the new start will allow for the changes in lifestyle necessary for a more sustainable future. The government will also change its attitude to the Third World from one of arrogance to gratitude. In these moments, the movie works as a secular form of jeremiad; 'secular' because the environmental catastrophe is not seen as punishment from God, but as human-created. Opie and Elliott argue that both 'implementational and evocative strategies' are necessary in successful jeremiads, and cite Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) as a powerful exemplar (Opie and Elliott 35).

The *Day After Tomorrow* also uses both pathos and rational argument to convince its audience of the need to take steps to avoid environmental catastrophe. Critical speculation on the effectiveness or otherwise of making a disaster movie about global warming can draw on the conclusions of an empirical study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research of the reception of the movie in Germany. This found that the movie did not appear to reinforce feelings of fatalism in its audience. Less than 10% of the sample agreed with the statement, 'There's nothing we can do anyway', whereas 82% preferred, 'We have to stop climate change'. Reusswig). Indeed, the Potsdam study makes hopeful reading for environmentalists. It found that the publicity surrounding the film triggered a new interest in climate change, and raised some issues previously unfamiliar to audiences, such as the role of oceans in global warming. A similar study of reception in the United States concluded that the film 'led moviegoers to have higher levels of concern and

worry about global warming, to estimate various impacts on the United States as more likely, and to shift their conceptual understanding of the climate system toward a threshold model.

Further, the movie encouraged watchers to engage in personal, political, and social action to address climate change and to elevate global warming as a national priority'. However, whether such changes constituted merely a 'momentary blip' in public perceptions remained to be seen (Leiserowitz 7). These empirical studies are important because they show that audience reception is a more complex and variable process than it is sometimes taken for in film theory. According to some versions of psychoanalytic 'subject positioning' theory, Hollywood movies like *The Day After Tomorrow* tend to render spectators passive.

Under the influence of Bertolt Brecht's theories of narrative, film academics such as Colin McCabe and Steven Heath argued that only modernist or avant-garde narrative techniques can produce a more active (even revolutionary) film spectator. As the 1992 textbook *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* puts it, psychoanalytic film theory 'sees the viewer not as a person, a flesh-and-blood individual, but as an artificial construct, produced and activated by the cinematic apparatus' (Stam 147). In his book *The Crisis of Political Modernism* (1999), D.

N. Rodowick exposes the flaws in such thinking. The politics of political modernism, he writes, assume 'an intrinsic and intractable relation between texts and their spectators, regardless of the historical or social context of that relation' (Rodowick 34). But film viewers are flesh-and-blood individuals, and when they are treated as such by film theorists and researchers, the

phenomenon of film reception becomes more complex and nuanced, and less deterministic and stereotyped, than that imagined by subject positioning theory.

Empirical audience research shows that we do not all watch the same movie in the same way, and that audience responses are complexly determined by a long list of variables, such as nation, region, locality, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and, last but certainly not least, individual temperament. When we look at the public reception of *The Day After Tomorrow*, then, it is clear that different interest groups appropriated the movie in different ways.

Both sides of the public debate about climate change interpreted the movie within a realist framework, either positively or negatively, and produced selective readings in order to further their own agendas. Patrick Michaels, one of the minority of scientists who stills rejects the idea of human-created climate change, pointed out the scientific flaws in the movie, and damned Hollywood for irresponsibly playing into the hands of liberal environmentalists by exaggerating the threat of global warming (Michaels 1).

Liberal-left environmental campaigners also understood that the movie's foundation in science was flawed. However, they found its scientific exaggerations and inaccuracies less important than what they saw as its realistic portrayal of the American government's denial of the scientific evidence for global warming. As former Vice-President Al Gore put it, 'there are two sets of fiction to deal with. One is the movie, the other is the Bush administration's presentation of global warming' (Mooney 1). Gore joined with the liberal Internet advocacy organization MoveOn. rg, which used the

movie's release as an opportunity to organize a national advocacy campaign on climate change. Senators McCain and Lieberman also used the movie to promote the reintroduction of their Climate Stewardship Act in Congress (Nisbet 1). Greenpeace endorsed the 'underlying premise' of the film, that 'extreme weather events are already on the rise, and global warming can be expected to make them more frequent and more severe'. It summed up its response to the movie with the line: 'Fear is justified' (Greenpeace 1-2).

The use of this movie to encourage environmental debate suggests that it is perhaps only if Hollywood movies like *The Day After Tomorrow* are people's sole, or even main, source of information on the environment that we should worry. As Sylvia Mayer argues, Hollywood environmentalist movies 'have the potential to contribute to the development of an 'environmentally informed sense of self' that is characterised by an awareness of environmental threats, by the wish to gain more effective knowledge about them and by a disposition to participate actively in efforts to remedy the problem' (Mayer 107).

In this respect, a classical, Hollywood-style narrative does not necessarily inculcate or reinforce a feeling a complacency or denial it its audience. In any case, no narrative can be as complex as the reality to which it refers; all art is a process of simplifying, selecting and giving shape to reality. Classical narrative forms and genre movies such as *The Day After Tomorrow* can focus thought and provide an imaginative and provocative response to environmental crisis.

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